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### Why Introverts Make Good Lawyers

By Lisa R. Harris, Esq.

When I choose my career path at an early age, I took into account my aversion to social interaction. I thought, I'll practice contract law and negotiate elaborate, time consuming and expensive contracts for professional athletes and facilitate commercial real estate transactions. I never thought I would see the inside of a courtroom, until I did and fell even more in love with the law. However, there was one very large problem. I am an introvert. I am not shy or as my mom used to say, "she's reserved." I am a thinker, a watcher, an observer, highly sensitive and a need-time-aloner. I have managed to navigate this trait while pursuing personal and professional passions. However, it was only in the last few years that I have truly examined my introversion, embraced it and incorporated it into my life to achieve a balance that works.

Oxford, McGill and Harvard Professor Dr. Brian Little is a renowned public speaker on psychology and well being. Dr. Little is also an introvert. Dr. Little developed the *Free Trait Theory*. Dr. Little's theory asserts that we are all born with certain personality traits - introversion for example, but we can engage in public speaking, attend social events and act "out of character" in the service of "core personal projects." This is why, in my opinion I am able to engage, connect in community with others, teach and advocate passionately. Introverts gain energy from solitude.<sup>1</sup> Introverts prefer one-on-one meetings, small groups and tend to reserve comment until they have had an opportunity to fully "vet" or think about a problem. Since external validation is not a strong motivating force for introverts, they will engage in work that is meaningful and worth their energy rather than seeking attention grabbing cases or positions.<sup>1d</sup> Introverts prefer the more docile, controlled environment of their own heads instead of seeking large group processes. As I thought about this article, I began doing some research about introverts and the legal profession and found not only support for my theory that introverts make awesome lawyers but found a soul sister in the process.

Christina Martini is a high powered partner with DLA Piper in Chicago and serves as the vice chair of the DLA Piper Chicago intellectual property group. Christina is also an author and a columnist. I found Christina's article titled, *The Perks of Being*

<sup>1</sup> *The Truth About Introverts- and why They Make Fabulous Lawyers*, The Legal Balance, May 30, 2013

*an Introverted Lawyer* online and invited her to contribute to this month's article. I found out she too had read the book, *The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking*, by Susan Cain and it was a pivotal moment in both of our lives. The book boldly, and with scientific data, gives a voice to introverts and motivates me to proudly own my introversion. After only a few minutes on the phone, I knew right away she had something powerful to share with introverts in the legal profession who engage in multitudes of social interaction. In Susan Cain's book, she explains that introverts are capable of acting like extroverts for the sake of work they consider important, people they love or anything they value highly. So, although during our daily lives we are fully present and "on", for one-third to one half of us, says Cain, this may not be our natural state. I asked Christina how do we deal with this? How do we take our highly sensitive, intellectual, would rather work alone than in a group selves and meld professions and passions that demand extroversion to expand our potential?

**Lisa:** What gives introverted lawyers the biggest challenge?

**Christina:** The legal profession has changed. In the past, once you mastered your craft, and then that was it, the business walked in the door. Now, you have to create and sustain relationships. Your success relies on the value and strength of your relationships.

**Lisa:** Once we acknowledge our introversion, how do we assimilate this trait into our lives?

**Christina:** Understanding that introverts may have a different approach to problem solving and team building and using that approach to expand instead of shrink opportunities. Emphasize your strengths of research, writing, intense focus and leverage those traits to best serve yourself and your career. Be mindful of your schedule and try to arrange meetings and events in an amount that is best aligned to add to instead of subtract from your energy. Try to take short breaks during the day or the week. Close your door or go for a walk and recharge in solitude.

**Lisa:** Introverts seem to be very self-critical and put a lot of pressure on themselves to be extroverted. How do introverts work-around this?

**Christina:** Get out of our heads and accept who we are. There is no right or wrong way to be, but acknowledging what inspires us and what drains us is vital. Introverts are thinkers and we think through and about everything. In order for us to advance our careers and serve our clients to the best of our ability we need to be attentive, engaged and yes, network. So, stop thinking and just do it. Develop a comfort zone for being outside your comfort zone.

**Lisa:** What advice would you give to an introvert that wants to "get out there" and network or serve their community but feels like they just cannot go to another traditional event?

**Christina:** Write a monthly article; do a monthly podcast or video on your area of specialty; donate your time doing legal research or writing briefs for a local not-for-profit; or put a box outside your office to collect supplies for a local shelter. These are effective ways of touching people without direct interaction.

**Lisa:** Why do introverts make great leaders?

**Christina:** Introverts make great leaders because they have strong listening skills; we are analytical; deep thinkers; deliberate and have a great deal of compassion. We all want to be heard and being able to listen and deeply think about information allows for a free flow of ideas and ultimately concept development and effective plan implementation.